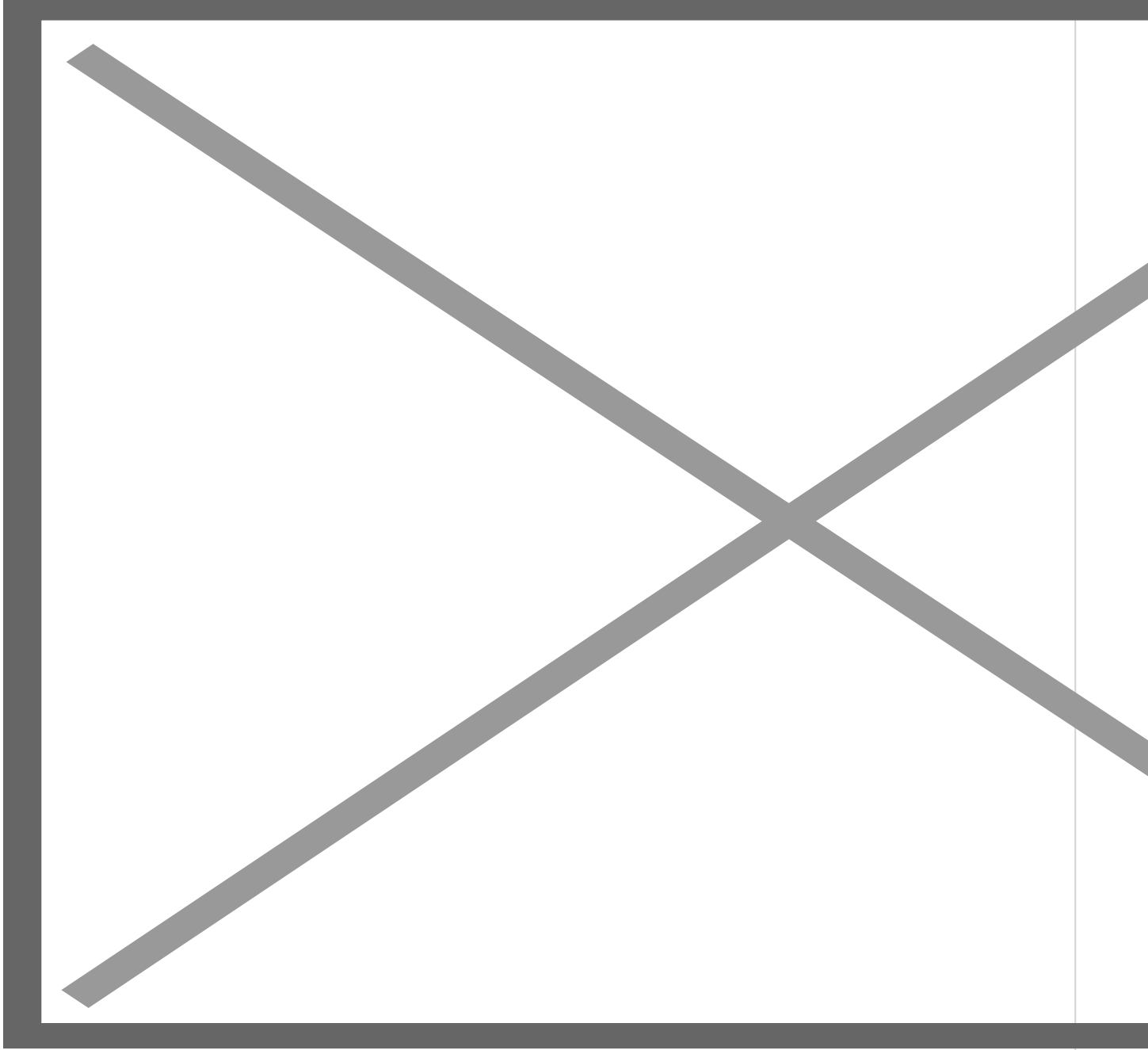


*Top U.S. lawmakers invite war
criminal Benjamin Netanyahu to
address Congress*

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously addressed Congress three times. Photo from March 2015. [Ronen Zvulun/Pool via AFP]

Washington, June 1 (RHC)-- The top legislators in the United States have issued a formal invitation for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to deliver a speech to Congress in the latest show of support for Israel amid its brutal genocidal war of aggression on Gaza.

The invitation by Republican and Democratic leaders in the Senate and House of Representatives on Friday came as the International Criminal Court considers issuing an arrest warrant for Netanyahu over

alleged war crimes.

“To build on our enduring relationship and to highlight America’s solidarity with Israel, we invite you to share the Israeli government’s vision for defending democracy, combatting terror, and establishing a just and lasting peace in the region,” the letter said. It did not specify a date for the speech.

The letter was signed by House Speaker Mike Johnson, Democratic House leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. If he accepts the invitation, Netanyahu would surpass the late former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as the foreign leader who has delivered the most speeches to a joint session of Congress.

Churchill -- who led his country through World War II and helped defeat Nazi Germany -- and Netanyahu have each addressed Congress on three separate occasions.

Netanyahu has been facing global outrage over Israel’s apparent abuses in Gaza, where the Israeli military has killed more than 36,000 people and destroyed large parts of the territory. Israel has also imposed a strict blockade in Gaza, bringing the territory to the verge of famine.

Netanyahu’s government defied its Western allies, including the United States, this month by launching a major assault in Rafah in southern Gaza, where nearly 1.5 million Palestinians had been sheltering. The offensive has displaced one million Palestinians.

An Israeli bombing of a camp for displaced people in Rafah earlier this month killed 45 Palestinians and sparked international outrage. But the U.S. Congress remains staunchly pro-Israel although some Democrats have been increasingly critical of Netanyahu.

In March, Schumer called for a new election in Israel and described Netanyahu as an obstacle to peace, citing the Israeli prime minister’s opposition to the two-state solution.

The congressional invite on Friday brought anger from Palestinian rights advocates. Actor Cynthia Nixon called it “shameful” in a social media post addressing Schumer. “Perhaps Netanyahu can be arrested for his war crimes on the Senate floor,” she wrote.

Earlier on Friday, U.S. President Joe Biden outlined a proposal that he said would lead to what he called an “enduring” ceasefire in Gaza. The three-phase plan would see the release of Israeli captives in the territory, as well as hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel, Biden said.

The initiative, which Biden said was put forward by Israel, marks a shift in the position of the U.S. administration, which had only sought a temporary truce while backing Israel’s goal of eliminating Hamas.

“President Biden understands that having this war drag well past his election is not going to be something that actually works for him politically,” Palestinian-American analyst Omar Baddar told Al Jazeera. “It’s incredibly costly and damaging for him, and I think that this is why he’s putting his foot down at this point and placing enormous pressure upon Israel to accept the ceasefire deal.”

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